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Iraq Sees Israelis Behind Iran Deal

Iraq's leaders are deeply offended by the Reagan administration's secret sale of arms to Iran, but they don't plan to break diplomatic relations with the United States. The reason is a little strange, even for the mysterious Middle East: The Iraqis believe the whole scheme was cooked up by Israel to throw a monkey wrench into U.S.-Iraqi relations, and they don't want to give the Israelis the satisfaction of having succeeded.

"We can conclude that the Israelis lured their American allies into the quagmire," Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz told Dale Van Atta in Baghdad. "This operation is neither a victory for the Iranians nor for the Americans. Israel is the sole beneficiary."

This single-minded view of the situation was also reflected by Aziz's undersecretary, Wissam Az-Zahaawy. He expressed confidence that the White House would be able to call on the "Israeli lobby" in Washington to bail it out of its present difficulties.

"It is an old story," Az-Zahaawy said. "The Israelis' primary aim is to undermine relations between the U.S. and Iraq. To destroy relations between the U.S. and the Arab world, they continue to do everything they can to damage relations with the United States and any Arab country."

The Iraqis feel betrayed by the Reagan administration. They are perhaps the most implacable of Israel's enemies, and almost since the start of the war with Iran six years ago, Iraqi intelligence was convinced that the Israelis were selling arms to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Whenever they got evidence pointing to Israeli-Iranian arms traffic, the Iraqis raised the issue with U.S. officials. The Americans would promise to check into the matter, and would come back saying the reports could not be confirmed. "Personally, I had my doubts," said Az-Zahaawy. And recent events have proved his skepticism well-founded.

In fact, we reported on April 30 that Israel was selling U.S.-made arms to the ayatollah with the "tacit approval" of the Reagan administration. We estimated that Israel had supplied more than \$250 million worth of weapons and ammunition to Iran since 1980. Israel's reasons, we reported, were "to make money, to get Iranian oil, to protect the 50,000 Jews living in Iran and to establish some links with the Iranian military officers that might be useful in a post-Khomeini era."

Conviction that Israel masterminded the U.S.-Iranian arms deal has caused Baghdad to try to "contain the damage," according to Az-Zahaawy. "We do not seek to damage relations" with the United States, he said. "Otherwise, we would be drawn into Zionist plans and programs."

His boss, Aziz, could not disguise his bitterness over what Iraq sees as Washington's duplicity.

"We were telling the American administration that the Israelis were providing arms [to Iran], and the Americans were telling us that the Israelis were telling them that they had stopped," Aziz said. "But now it's clear to us that [the United States] knew actually that Israel was providing military equipment with [U.S.] knowledge and agreement. A green light was given to Israel."